

NW Bicester

An application for the exemplar phase of the
NW Bicester Eco Development proposals submitted by
P3Eco (Bicester) Limited and the A2Dominion Group

Revised

Design and Access Statement

FARRELLS



April 2011

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1.0 **Introduction**

1.1 **Summary**

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) is submitted in support of a planning application by P3Eco (Bicester) Limited (P3Eco) and A2 Dominion Group (A2D) to develop land to the north west of Bicester for a residential mixed used development as the exemplar phase of a wider proposal to develop land at NW Bicester as an Eco Development pursuant to The Supplement to PPS1 entitled ‘eco-towns’ and the emerging Core Strategy of Cherwell District Council.

The application was originally submitted in November 2010 and this document has been written to accompany an amended submission following comments received from officers, key stakeholders and local residents

1.2 **Location of the Application Site**

Bicester is a market town some 11 miles to the north east of Oxford and equidistant between London and Birmingham. The location of Bicester is indicated on figure 1.



FIG.1 Location of Bicester



FIG.2 Location of wider proposal to develop land to the north west of Bicester

Around the north western edge of Bicester it is proposed to create a new urban Eco-Town extension. The masterplan area for this extension is shown on figure 2.



FIG.3 Location of Application Site

The Application Site is along the northern edge of this new masterplanned extension and is shown on figure 3.

1.3 Application Description

The proposed development was defined in the original planning submission as follows:

“Development of Exemplar phase of NW Bicester Eco Development to secure full planning permission for 393 residential units and an energy centre (up to 400 square metres), means of access, car parking, landscape, amenity space and service infrastructure and outline permission for a nursery of up to 350 square metres (use class D1), a community centre of up to 350 square metres (sui generis), 3 retail units of up to 770 square metres (including but not exclusively a convenience store, a post office and a pharmacy (use class A1)), an Eco-Business Centre of up to 1,800 square metres (use class B1), office accommodation of up to 1,100 square metres (use class B1), an Eco-Pub of up to 190 square metres (use class A4), and a primary school site measuring up to 1.34 hectares with access and layout to be determined”.

This resubmission is supported by a number of technical assessments and related documents and these are set out in the original Parameters Document and the covering letter to this revised submission. This Design and Access Statement (DAS) should be read in conjunction with those documents, in particular the Planning Statement which sets out the planning context and policy Provisions for the proposals. The planning context is briefly summarised below.

1.4 Planning Context

In June 2009 P3Eco launched their ‘Vision for the future of Bicester’ prepared by Farrells, which promoted that the eco development at Bicester should contribute to the regeneration of Bicester as part of a holistic plan to transform the town into a stronger sustainable community.

The land at North West Bicester was identified in the Supplement to (PPS1) entitled ‘Eco Towns’ (July 2009) as a location for a potential Eco Town. The Supplement

sets out a range of criteria against which Eco Town proposals should be assessed.

P3Eco are promoting all the land at North West Bicester for an Eco development through the Cherwell Core Strategy DPD.

P3Eco have selected A2Dominion Group as its development partner for the promotion and implementation of the exemplar scheme, and also as affordable housing partner in respect of the wider master plan proposals. Representations were submitted in response to the consultation drafts of the Core Strategy dated April 2010.

Within the Core Strategy, Cherwell District Council has identified that an eco-development of 5,000 homes should be developed on land at North West Bicester with 3,200 homes to be delivered in the period to December 2026.

The emerging policy seeks to:

- Provide a development of 5,000 homes;
- Create a development that will be a zero carbon development as defined in the PPS;
- Deliver a high quality local environment taking into account climate change adaptation;
- Homes that achieve Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes (Code level 5 for the exemplar scheme);
- Access to one employment opportunity for each new dwelling within easy reach by walking, cycling and / or public transport;
- At least 50% of trips originating from the

development should be made by means other than the private car with potential to rise to 60%; and

- 40% of the total gross site area will be provided as green space of which half will be public open space.

1.5 Scope and Content of the DAS

This DAS sets out the analysis and description of the site, the evolution and evaluation of the design and its context and highlights key generators for the design process, and how the final design responds to them

2.0

Context

2.1

Historical Context

A brief look at the history of Bicester shows there has been a settlement at or near Bicester for a long time.

The market town of Bicester we know today was established in the 13th Century as two smaller adjacent settlements, Kings End and Market End, grew together.

Located near the cross roads of two Roman roads and at a crossing point of the River Bure, evidence of settlement has been found in archaeological explorations dating back to the Ice Age.

The Romans established a fort nearby at Alchester and when the Romans left the Saxons and then the Normans maintained a trading settlement. Named in the Domesday Book, the entry identified two key manor lands and a population of about 200 residents.

Over subsequent years as routes improved particularly to and from London hunting lands became farming lands and land wealth grew. The area remained rural and despite the Victorian growth of the railways and other public services Bicester remained a typical small but important rural centre.

In the 20th Century a connection with the RAF and Army was created with the development of a new airfield and an ordinance depot and with it came alternative skills and employment.

The completion of the M40 between London and Birmingham nearby transformed access and Bicester has subsequently grown, providing homes and employment opportunities.

The new North West Extension, of which this application is the first part, seeks to build upon these recent changes and take Bicester into the future.

The OS plans opposite show how Bicester has grown significantly since WWII and how cohesive and sensitive plans for its future growth are essential.

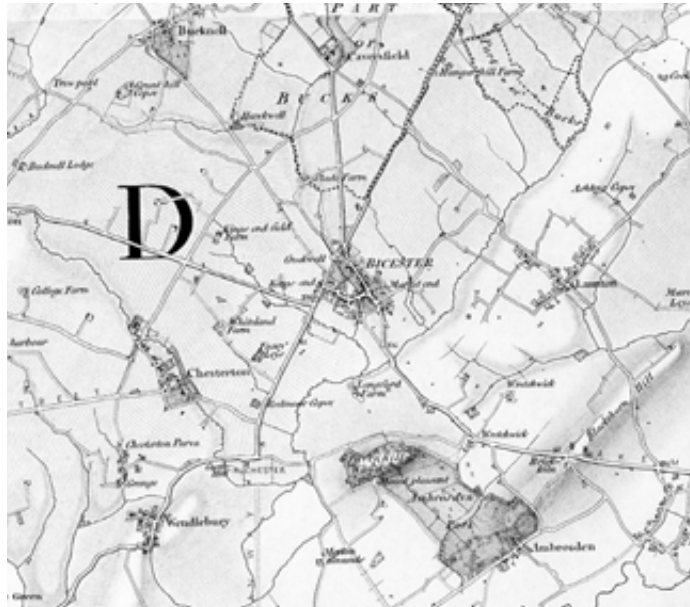


FIG.4 Bicester 1828-1833



FIG.5 Bicester 1898-1899



FIG.6 Bicester 1919



FIG.7 Bicester 1946-1947



FIG.8 Bicester Today



FIG.9 A holistic vision for Bicester

2.2 Links and Transport

Within close proximity to the M40, Bicester has easy and fast links to Britain’s motorway network and the whole of the country.

Its two railway stations also provide key north/south connections to London and Birmingham and east/west connections to Cambridge and Oxford.

Bicester also has local bus services to Oxford and Banbury, and is served by long-distance route X5 between Oxford and Cambridge.

Bicester’s proximity to junction 9 of the M40 motorway provides good road links to London, Birmingham and Banbury. It also has good road links to Oxford, Kidlington, Brackley, Buckingham, Aylesbury and Witney.

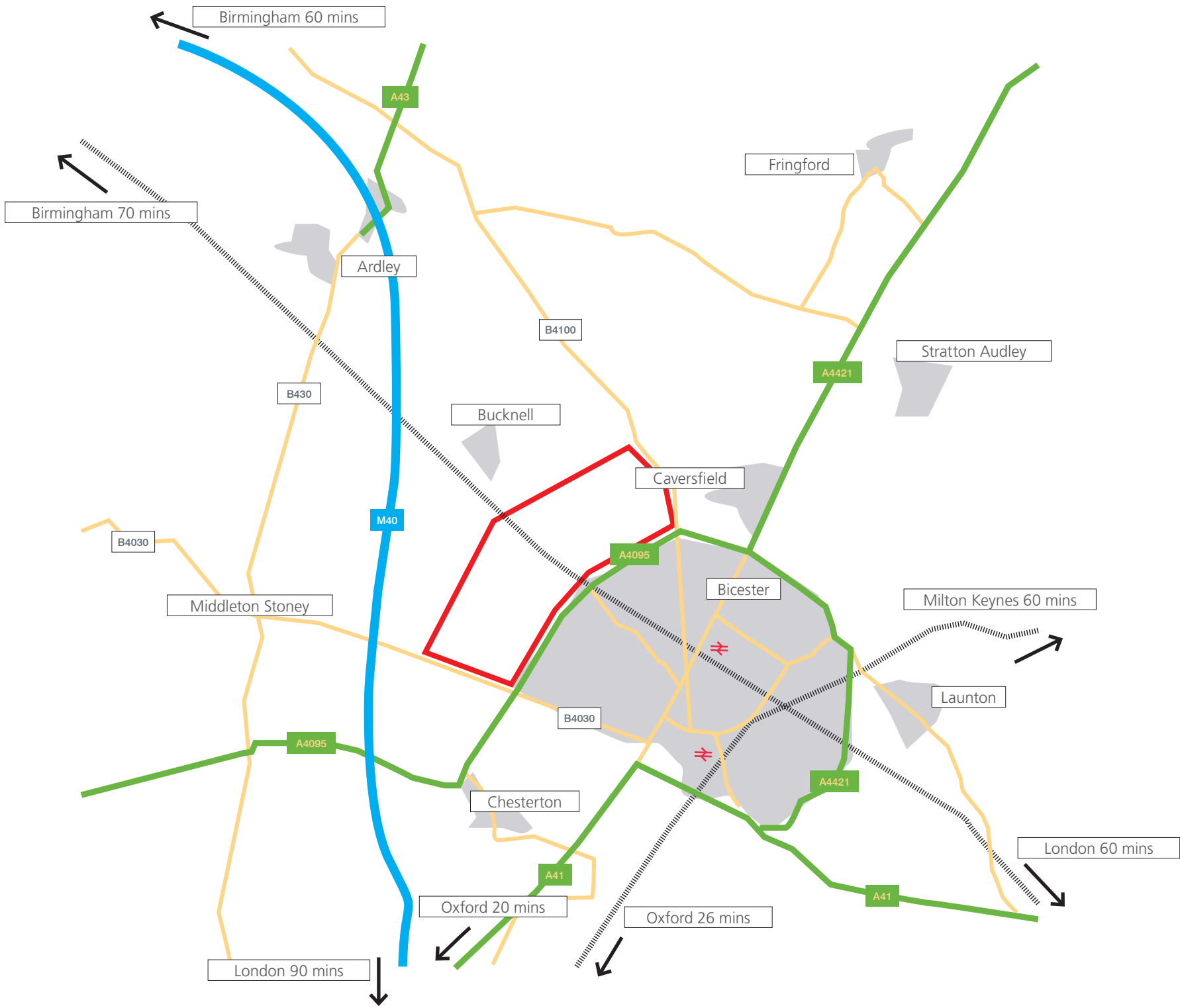


FIG.10 Key Links and Transport Routes

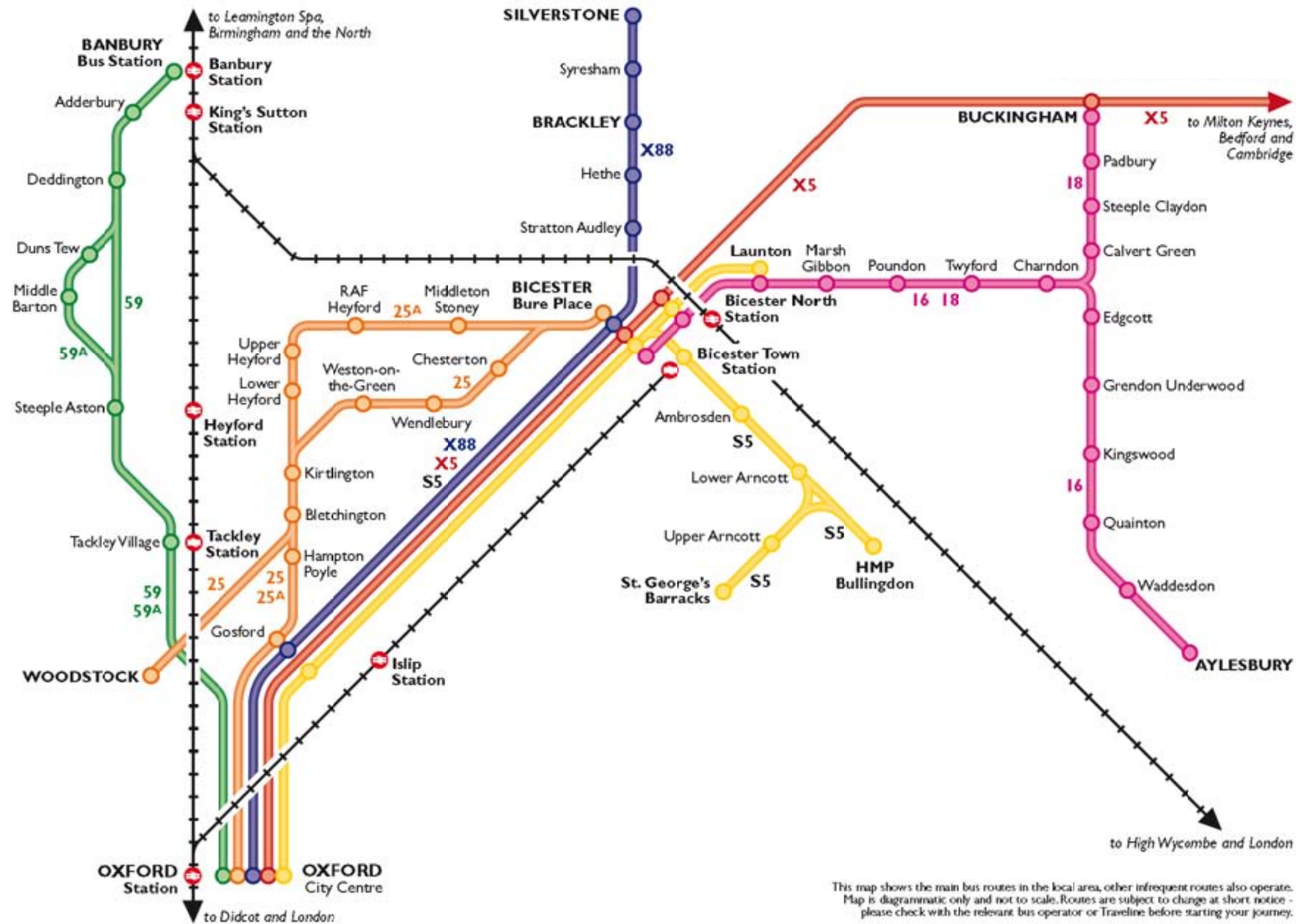


FIG.11 Bicester Town Bus and Rail Services

3.0 Masterplan for NW Bicester

3.1 Masterplan Analysis

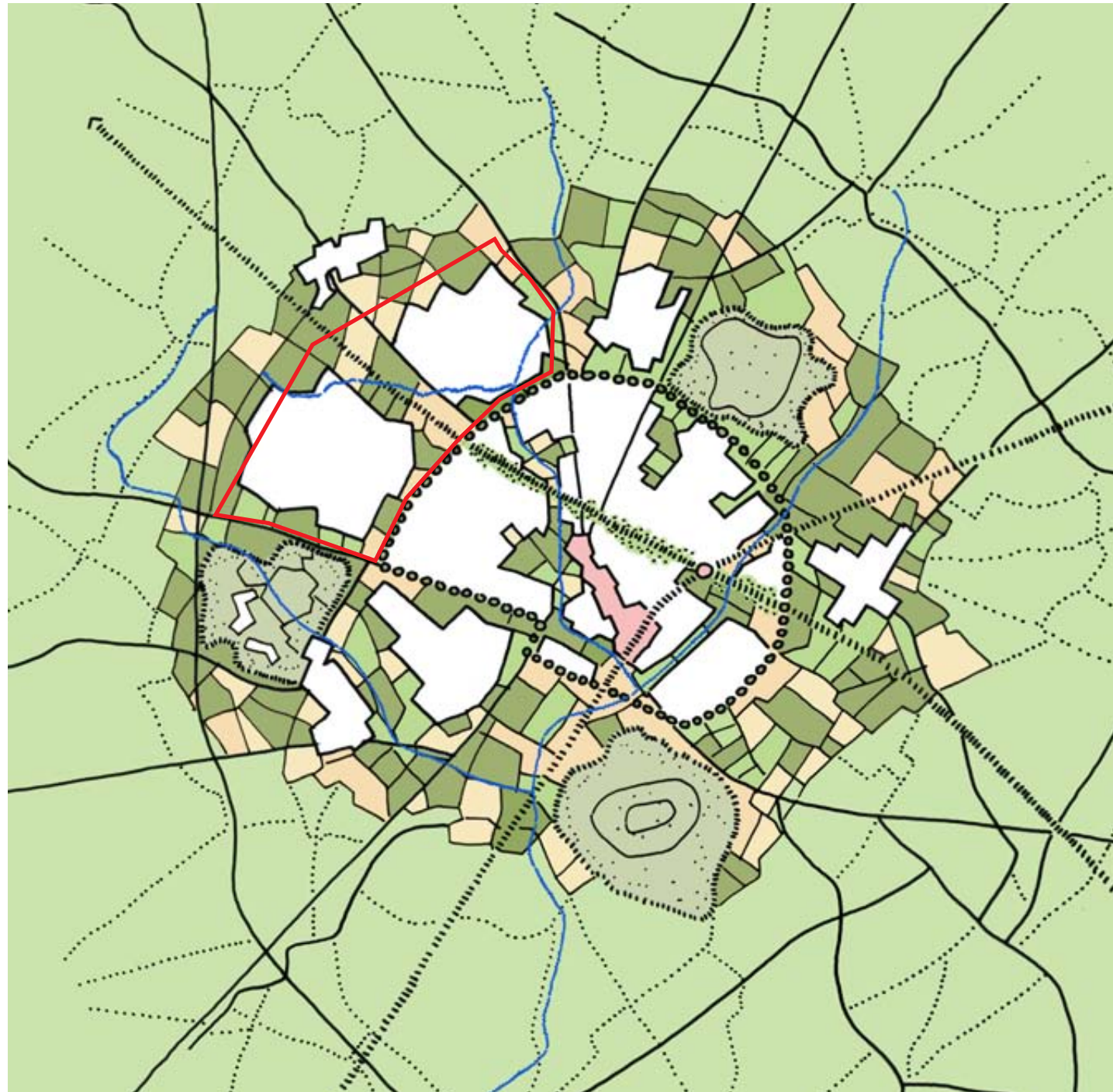
As the Application site is part of a wider masterplan for the whole of North West Bicester it is important to understand how that overall masterplan was prepared.

A detailed analysis of the masterplan proposals and its design evolution are set out within the masterplan statement that accompanied the application submission. However an overview of the key aspects are set out as follows:

- Extend the town with 5000 zero carbon homes
- Enable the countryside to infiltrate the development with green open spaces linked into Bicester town
- Encourage the integration of new and existing communities with shared services and infrastructure
- Work with the laws of nature to create landscape as the primary infrastructure
- Link communities with the sites history creating local centres around existing farmsteads
- Create renewable energy production harnessed locally
- Retain existing businesses
- Create new employment through new starts, growth of existing firms and onward investment with emphasis on businesses in eco-construction, environmental goods and services and other high value areas.
- Disperse employment and community facilities

across new local centres

- Provide integrated transport links throughout the site and into the existing town centre and rail stations
- Ensure that all parts of the site are within 400m walking distance of a regular bus route
- Humanise the ring road by creating crossing and frontage designed to the scale of people not cars
- Community and service facilities to be distributed within close walking distances of all housing
- Build an existing bus and public transport infrastructure reducing the reliance on the private car



This Diagram identifies the land in north west Bicester that became the first part of Bicester's sustainable expansion proposed in the Farrell's holistic vision for the growth of Bicester.

FIG.12 A holistic vision for Bicester



FIG.13 Aerial of Bicester with NW Bicester Eco Development boundary

This Diagram places the boundary of the proposed north west expansion of Bicester on an aerial photograph. This is the area included within the new overall masterplan search area.

3.2 The Site

Parish Boundaries

The masterplan site is located within four parish boundaries, Bucknell, Caversfield, Bicester and Chesterton.

An analysis of the site boundaries is set out in the masterplan statement but to the south east is the A4095 (Howes Lane/Lords Lane) ring road. To the south west is Middleton Stoney Road, to the north east is Banbury Road and Caversfield. To the north west is open farmland and to the north is open farmland and Bucknell. The site is divided across the centre by the Birmingham to London railway embankment.

3.3 Landscape Analysis

3.3.1 NW Bicester Site Context Today

The masterplan area landscape can be broadly described as having a:

- Rolling topography with localised steep slopes
- Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes
- Large parklands and mansion houses
- A regularly shaped field pattern dominated by

arable fields

- Small villages with strong vernacular character

Landcover: Mixed farmland is the dominant landcover, with arable farming forming the principal use and pasture generally on the steeper slopes. The agricultural land is generally characterised by a geometric pattern of medium to large fields.

Settlement and communications: Settlement is characterised by scattered farmsteads generally with a strong vernacular character. This character is reinforced by features such as stone walls and stone buildings with stone or clay tiled roofs.

3.3.2 Topography and Natural features

Contours, Gradients and watercourses

The site generally slopes from north west to south east with a height above ordnance datum at the highest of approximately 95m AOD to the lowest at 75m AOD. The general slope of approx 20m in 2km creates average gradients of 1 in 100. There are streams subdividing the general slopes creating distinctive characters in different parts of the site. The streams

provide important habitats and are the location of some of the larger groupings of trees all.

Hedgerows and Woodlands

There are approximately 28km of existing hedgerows enclosing farm land in field sizes. The ecology and habitat survey has established that whilst there is a range of hedgerow quality from species rich and species poor, the hedgerows are the most significant contributor to the biodiversity of the site.

There are areas of existing species rich woodland in the masterplan site. The woodlands are generally large groups of trees adjacent to the streams. In the south of the site there is a woodland belt of approx 3.5 hectares which has been planted in recent years to screen Himley Farm.

The existing farm buildings will be retained to provide a major contribution to the diversity of the uses and character in the masterplan and will be subject of further landscape and design character assessment studies.

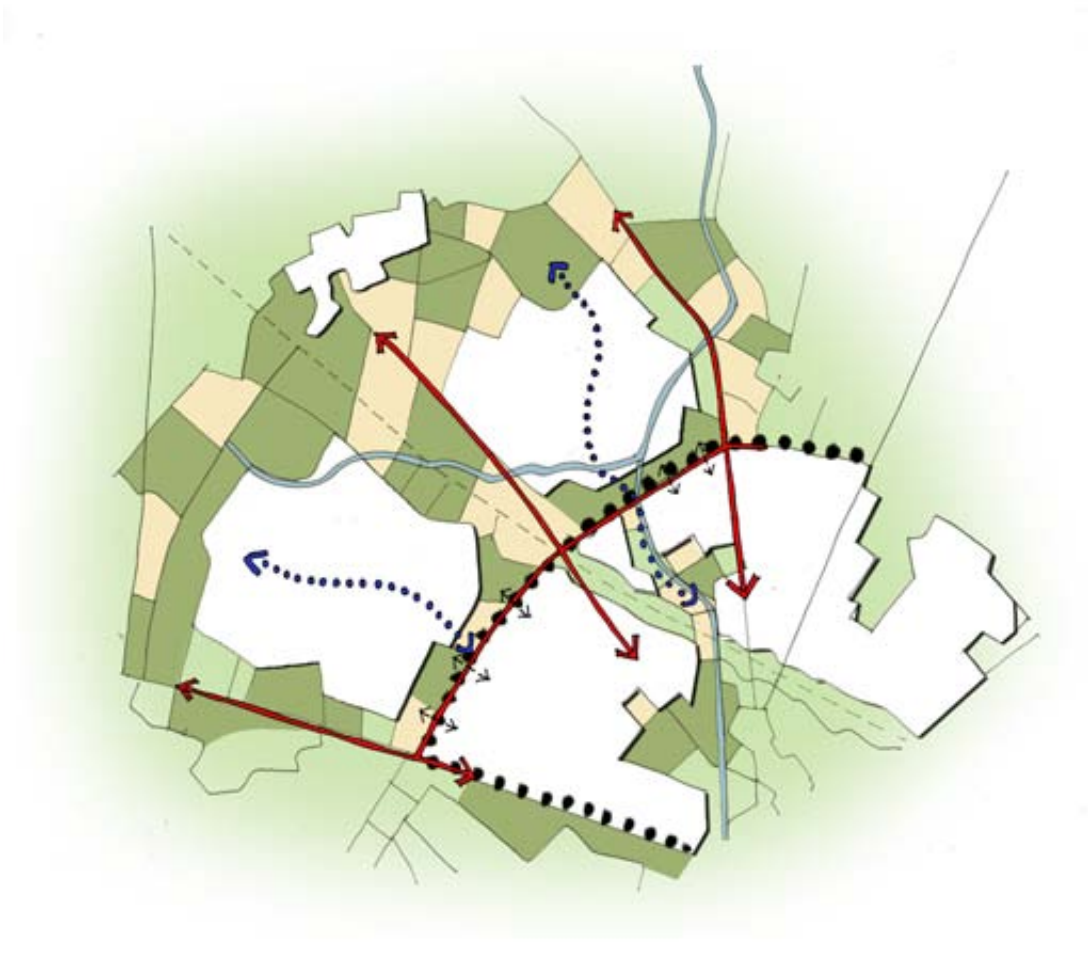


FIG.14 Key links to Bicester

One of the key drives for the masterplan was to ensure that it would be integrated into Bicester. This diagram highlights:

1. The potential crossing points over the ring road.
2. Key road connections
3. Indicative additional routes to break down the areas of land which might provide cycle/pedestrian and green links back to Bicester town centre.



FIG.15 Four Villages

Analysing the topography and existing landscape features, this diagram considers how the development could come forward around the key links back into Bicester. This arrangement creates four new potential 'villages'.

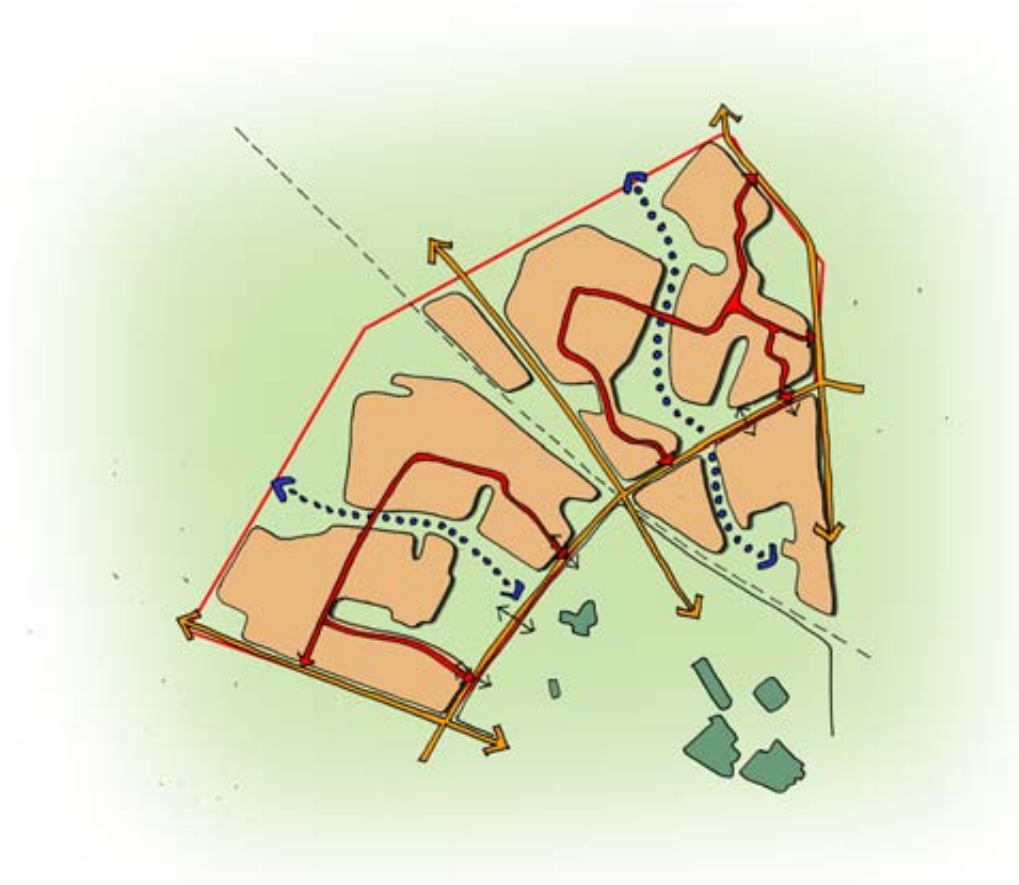


FIG.16 Main Routes

This diagram shows how a further layer of road connections could be applied over the potential villages.

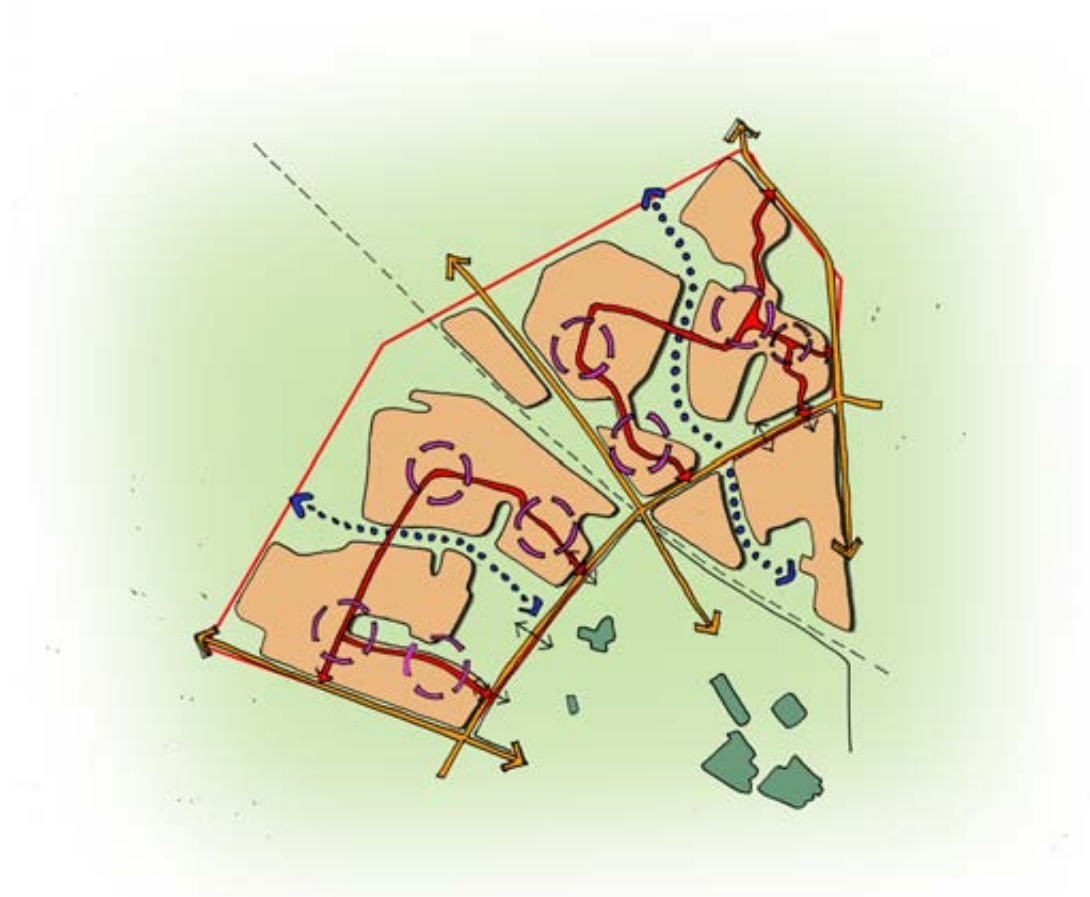


FIG.17 Village Hubs

This diagram shows where village hubs could be created.

Masterplan for north west Bicester
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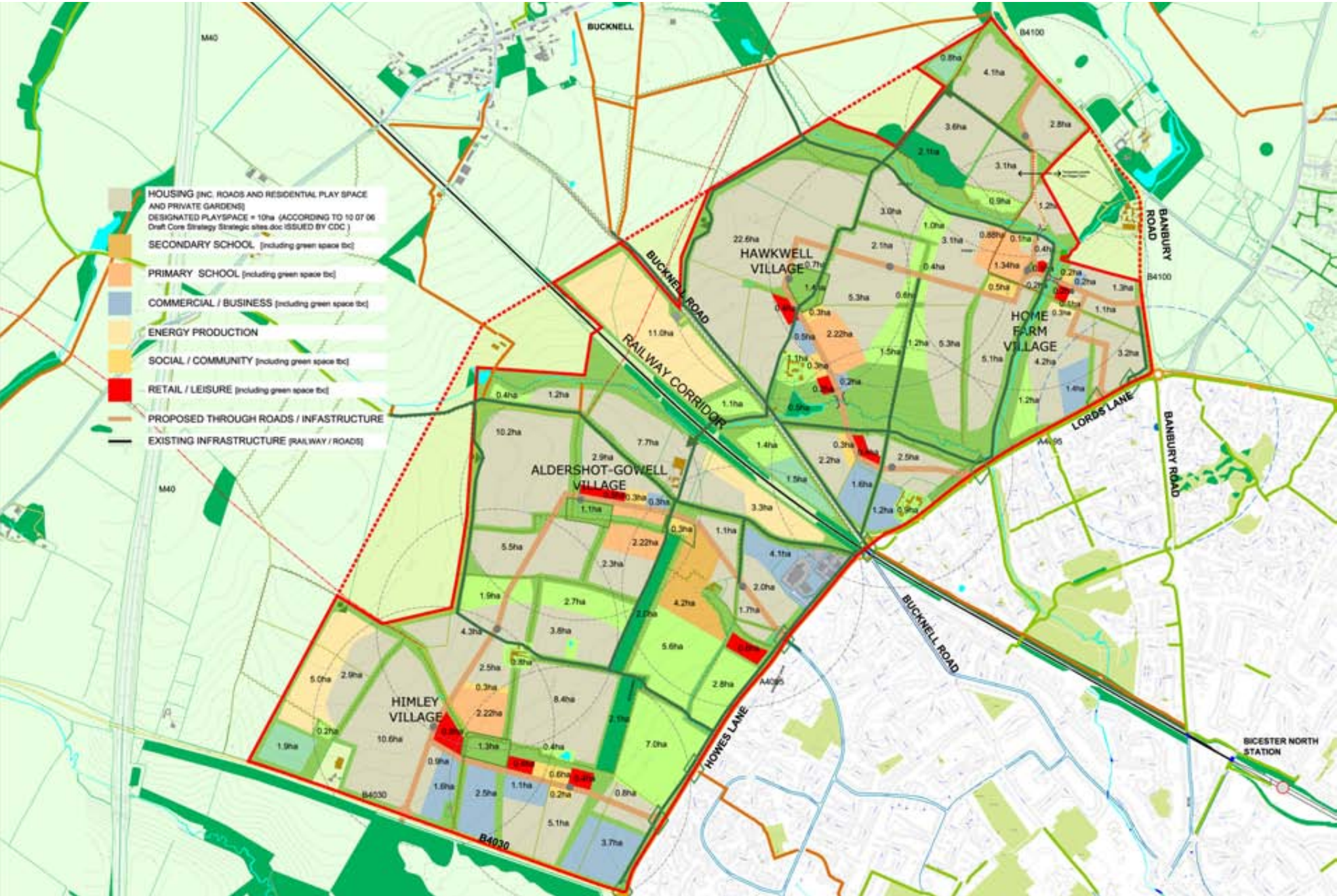


FIG.18 NW Bicester Masterplan Land-Use drawing

Having analysed the preceeding factors including landscape, topography, road connections and the location of village hubs, it is possible to create a masterplan for NW Bicester that has been the subject of public consultation.

The masterplan creates a social infrastructure with the objectives:

- 4 Hubs / village centres for services located within walking range of a 400m radius of residential areas
- A new crossing over/ under the rail for pedestrians and cyclists
- The secondary school is to the south of the railway close to Howes Lane
- A 15 hectare area of green space is provided suitable for sports recreation space close to Howes Lane
- The area of non residential uses is approx 12% of the development area.
- A potential area for energy production has been identified adjacent to the railway
- The character of the layout and public open space in the new villages is based on similar size and scale of villages in the surrounding Oxfordshire area
- All parts of the site are within 800m walking distance of a regular bus route

- The village centres have a mix of land uses and the masterplan co-locates these where possible to allow flexibility for shared use of facilities and parking.
- Local centres are focused on village greens and market squares with primary schools, eco business centres, eco pubs, village stores, shops, nurseries and health centres
- Local centres based around existing farmstead
- Local centres vary in scale according to location
- Employment dispersed across all local centres

A learning and innovation campus linked to Oxford and Cherwell Vallery College will be located with good accessibility to Bicester Town station.

3.3.3 Four new villages become the focus for the social and cultural infrastructure

Existing farm buildings are to be retained and become the heart around which the new village centres are grown.

The NW Bicester eco development aims to be a catalyst for the wider regeneration of Bicester town by:

- Make the historic town centre the 'heart' of the place
- Get local people to shop locally
- Develop a variety of related new activities
- Create a destination for the local communities
- Improve the quality of the public realm
- Make the most of Bicester's strategic position
- Create a sustainable transport plan for the town

3.4 Public Consultation

The masterplan and exemplar schemes have been developed in conjunction with the consultant team using a series of workstream-based workshops to discuss subjects such as design and sustainable construction, green infrastructure, transport and access, energy, waste and water, employment, training and local community facilities. The workshops have been attended by key stakeholders to allow for input at early stages and in turn to assist in the development of the proposals.



FIG.19 Public Consultation events

4.0 The Application Site

4.1 The Application Site

Having set out how the overall masterplan for north west Bicester was developed we now turn to the Application Site and the proposals for the exemplar scheme.

The Application site comprises approximately 21 hectares of farm land lying to the west of Banbury Road (B4100) and to the north of Bicester Town and its ring road.

The site is located at the north eastern edge of the wider masterplan proposals for NW Bicester, to the north east of the railway viaduct and Bucknell Road. To the north and east are the villages of Bucknell and Caversfield respectively.

The red-line boundary encloses the land of Home Farm and views are afforded from it to Caversfield House and the Anglo-Saxon St Laurence's Church.

The 'bow-tie' shape of the red-line line boundary contains a varying topography and sits within the



FIG.20 The Application Site

Application Site
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defined landscape character of Caversfield Valleys and Ridges. The land is predominantly pasture, is not publicly accessible and contains no built forms.

The site can be divided into three distinct zones; the southern field, the watercourse and the northern fields.

4.1.1 The Southern Fields

The southern fields front the Banbury Road as it extends northwards from Bicester town centre and is mostly flat before falling approximately 5m into a valley defined by a tree-lined watercourse that is dry for the majority of the year. The field has a sense of enclosure due to the established hedgerows to all sides with breaks for field access and farm activities.

4.1.2 The Watercourse Zone

The central watercourse zone contains the most interesting variation in topography within the site falling in two directions to the watercourses travelling north/south and east/west before rising up to meet the two fields to the north. The two watercourses that transect this area have different characters. One has low level reeds in contrast to the wooded character of the watercourse leading to Home Farm. Hedgerows are prevalent to the south and western boundaries. Views of Home Farm and the gable of St Laurence’s Church emerging from woodland are visible in this zone.



FIG.21 Panoramic of Southern Field



FIG.22 Photograph of wooded watercourse



FIG.23 Photograph of watercourse bed



FIG.24 Site Topography

The watercourse zone is also rich in ecology with a badger sett adjacent to the east/west watercourse and an annex sett adjacent to the north/south brook. There is also a bat roost in this location. Further information regarding the site's ecology can be found in Arup's Ecological report included in the Environmental Statement. At the edge of the northern fields there is an existing access from the farm to the two adjacent fields which will continue to be used for pasture for the livestock.

4.1.3 Northern Fields

The northern fields have their longest frontage onto the B4100 at the north edge of the Application Site. The fields are arranged within a perpendicular framework of hedgerows, which increase in depth as they meet the carriageway edge and in the northern most corner the hedgerows merge with woodland, masking a road lay-by. These top two fields are currently accessed by means of a track from Home Farm and also from a small entrance adjacent to the central hedgerow.

The setting of St Laurence's Church and Home Farm is a key consideration in the development of the upper northern fields.



FIG.25 Panoramic of middle zone



FIG.26 Location of badger sett



FIG.27 Panoramic of the northern field (west)



FIG.28 Home Farm



FIG.29 Home Farm



FIG.30 St. Laurence's Church

4.2 Design Evolution

The layout for the exemplar development has progressed through a series of iterations before arriving at the scheme that has formed the basis of this revised submission to the Council. The following section gives an over-view of how the scheme has evolved to include reference to key stages in the layout evolution.

Prior to preparing an initial layout an Open Planning Week workshop was undertaken with key stakeholders to ascertain what they expected of an eco-development and what they wanted to see provided within the NW Bicester eco-development. Whilst relating in the main to aspirations for the overall masterplan it was clear that local facilities such as retail units, a village pub, a community centre, a school and employment opportunities should be physically provided whilst also providing an attractive landscaped environment to recreate within.

Following the agreement of what should be contained within the exemplar phase agreement was reached

as to which part of the masterplan area was to form the application site for the exemplar phase. Whilst challenging in shape it was chosen due to land acquisition and also as it contained two water courses for which their treatment could be tested and assist in influencing the wider masterplan concept. The principle of the location of the exemplar site was agreed with officers of the Council at this early point in time.

4.2.1 Opportunities and constraints

A consideration of the constraints and opportunities of the site along with the client brief that set out what non residential uses are to be provided along with the aspirational housing mix enabled design work to be undertaken on the evolution of the layout design.

Once the application site had been resolved a constraints and opportunities assessment was undertaken to establish what restrictions existed on undertaking the development and also to establish development platforms i.e. those areas free from constraints.

Application Site
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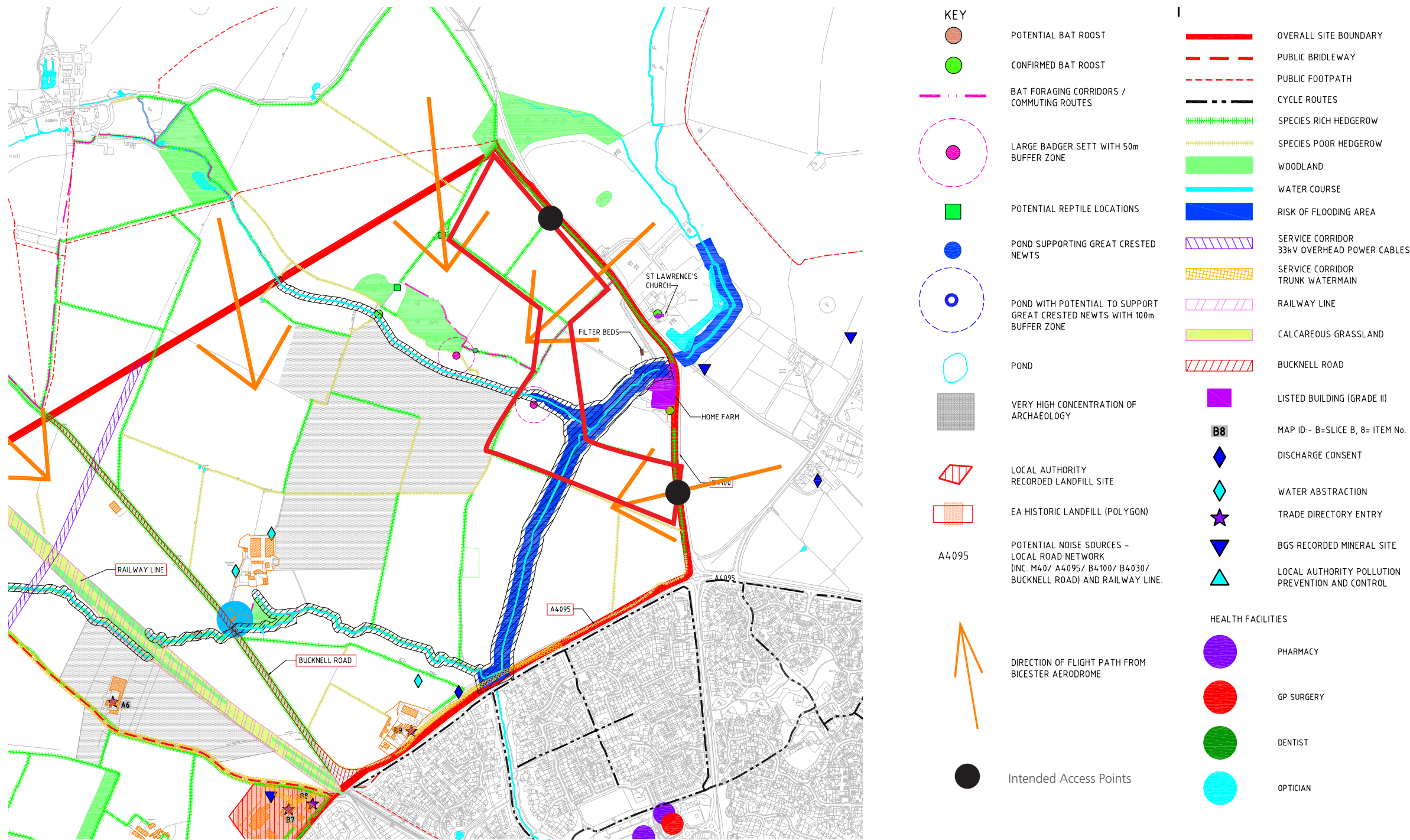


FIG.31 Opportunities and Constraints Plan

4.2.2 Initial Concept Drawing

Prior to considering an initial layout for any development on the site and having regard to the matters set out above a high level series of concept sketches were produced which sought to identify the key factors that should assist in considering any layout.

These concepts are set out in figures 32-37 and demonstrate how consideration was given to the: location of the village centre in the heart of the scheme, the potential connections to later phases, the use of topography and watercourses and the inter connectivity with Bicester. These factors enabled some initial concepts to be tested as to the marketability of the idea.

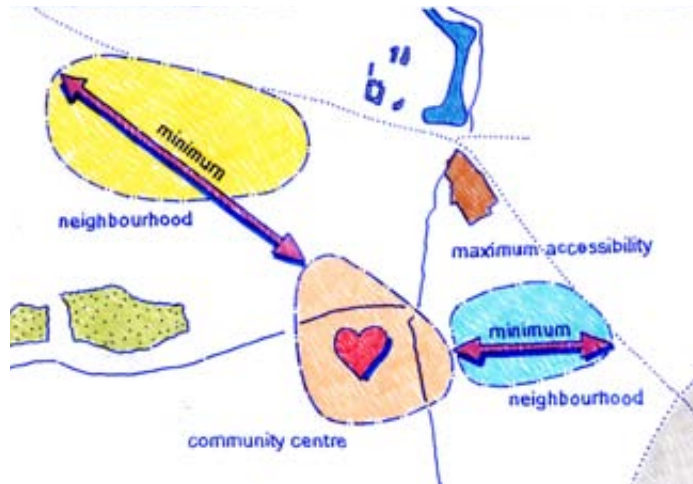


FIG.32 The village centre is placed at the heart of the scheme

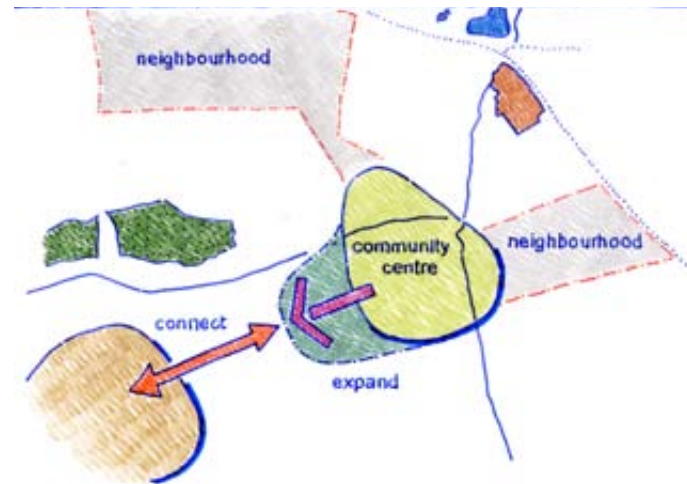


FIG.33 The centre is located to facilitate expansion and connection

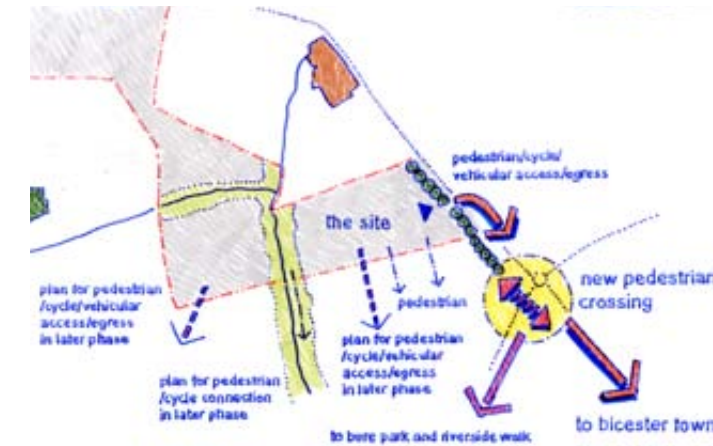


FIG.34 A new connection is made to Bicester

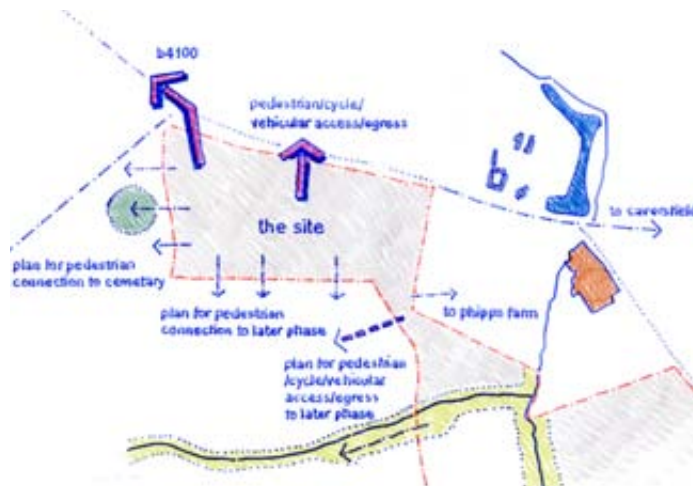


FIG.35 Connections are made to later phases

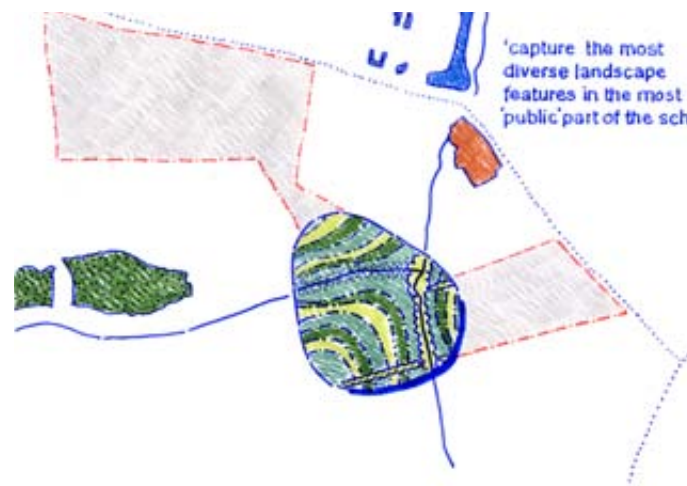


FIG.36 The central area is contrasted using the topography and watercourses for their inspiration



FIG.37 Hedgerows and existing habitats have been supplemented to create new landscape settings

4.2.3 Layout One

Following a review of the concept sketches it was resolved to test the concept of locating the village facilities to the south and in a central location to ensure they are located as close to as many properties as possible. Furthermore, their location here would ensure that as future phases of development emerged to the south of the exemplar phase those properties would then be in close proximity to the facilities established through the exemplar scheme.

A copy of layout one and the village centre studies are set out at figures 38 and 39.

When tested with a potential retail provider they supported the indicative location of the retail units to the east of the stream. This was on the grounds that the number of residential units set out on the site would not support a store in the heart of the scheme and passing traffic on the Banbury Road would need to be relied upon to make the retail units viable.

Moving forward, initial ecological information was emerging and the design team were beginning to form views as to how to respond to the watercourse. In parallel with these studies research on post medieval poly focal villages was being undertaken for national settlements and local villages. This analysis led to an arrangement with a market square to the east and a village green to the west, providing different settings for the retail based uses and a quieter environment for the school and care home. The road link to the south was placed next to the hedgerow due to the location of a badger sett.

Whilst the site area identified in this layout is different to that which forms the exemplar submission, the design concept provided for the following:

- Non residential uses in the southern / central section of the site;
- Protection around the identified badger sett;
- A residential development that followed the orthogonal pattern of the hedgerow;
- The retention of hedgerows and therefore biodiversity credentials; and
- The provision of a village green and market square.



FIG.38 Layout One

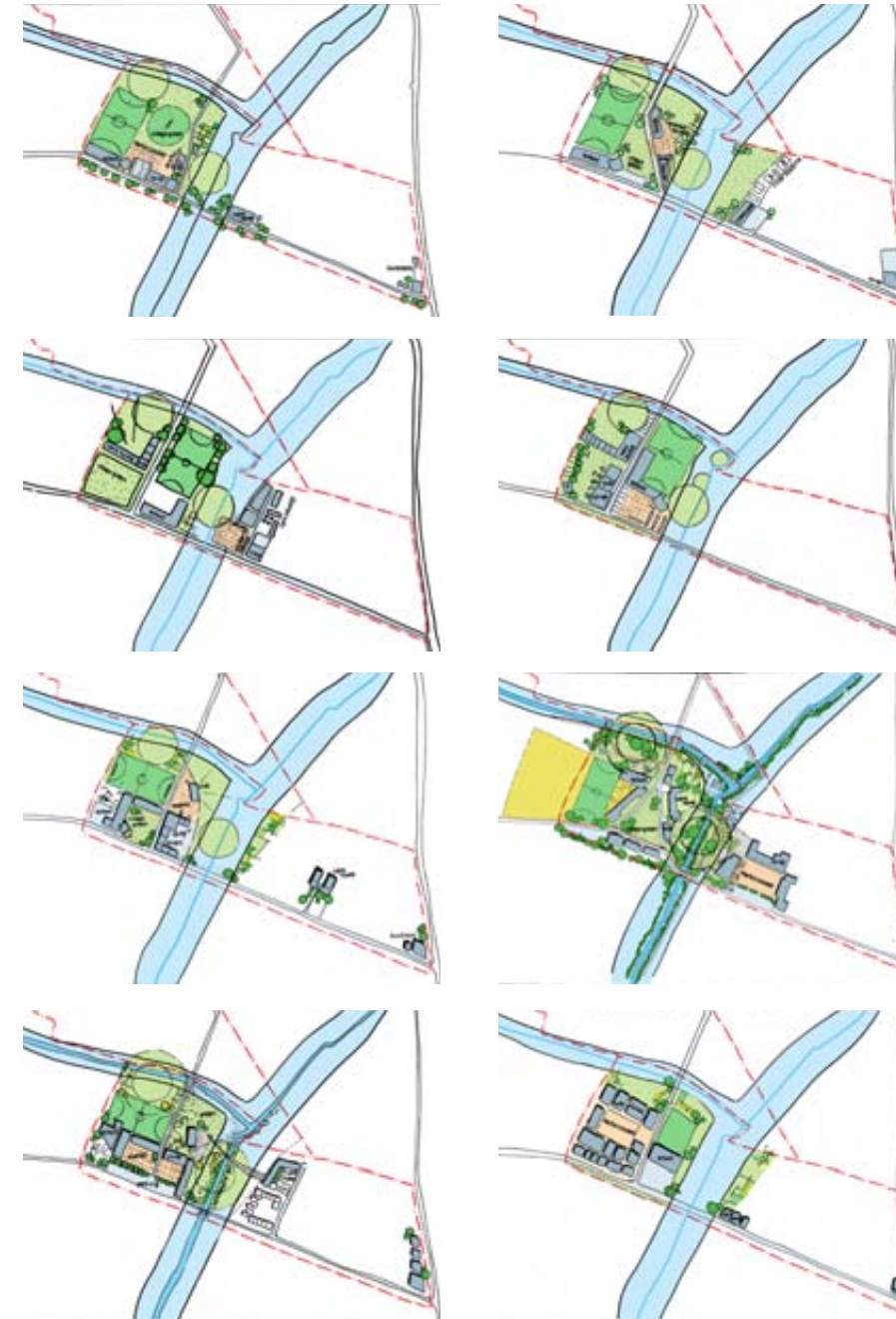


FIG.39 Village Centre Studies

4.2.4 Layout Two

Following the drafting of the initial layout it was the subject of a public consultation event entitled ‘Testing Ideas’. That event raised concerns that the suggested layout would result in the loss of hedgerows and trees and did not provide for the inclusion of allotments. Finally, local stakeholders and residents were concerned that the location of the exemplar scheme would create a detached settlement from Bicester thereby going against the aspirations of the PPS1 supplement.

Moving forward the design concepts sought to have further regard to the landscape assessment and ecology studies to influence the design by seeking to respond more clearly to the existing natural features and provide buffer zones to the hedgerows.

In addition, further analysis was undertaken of local village precedents to understand their size and the facilities contained within the village centre settings. A review of this analysis which can be seen in figures 40-42 and assisted in influencing the village square and the village green designs.

As a consequence of the above, the second layout sought to show refinement of the village setting and to create greater containment by placing accommodation to the south and opening the spaces to the watercourse.

Furthermore, the existing field patterns have been incorporated into the proposed layouts to thereby have regard to the rural nature of the site. In this regard the northern fields contains a green link supporting a wildlife corridor which connects with the ancient woodlands to the north and the vehicular access point has been selected following a review of the highway constraints.

These factors transpired into layout two (figure 43) which sought to respond more to the landscape assessment and the ecology studies for which results were coming forward and the suggested red edge boundary of the site had been amended to reflect negotiations with the current land owner. Furthermore a connecting route between the northern and southern part of the site had been introduced so as to allow for inter-connectivity within the development.



FIG.40 Village Green Studies

FIG.41 Village Square Studies

FIG.42 Landscape Studies



FIG.43 Layout Two

4.2.5 Layout Three

Following a review of layout two, the Planning Authority raised concerns relating to the narrowness of the green link and its ability to support allotments/ play space and provide ecological habitats. Furthermore, they expressed concern that the car parking in front of properties would lead to a suburban typology that was not in keeping with the local area or the aspirations of the eco-town concept.

Following the above comments, further work was undertaken into the village setting to enable consideration to be given to the gradient of the contours and also the need for a bridge crossing. This modelling assisted in promoting a robust green infrastructure strategy that would provide for an attractive space that meets the needs of the community in a compliant and accessible manner. Examples of the village green and village square concepts are shown in figures 44 and 45.

Whilst the village setting was considered further it is accepted that the housing continued to illustrate terraces to enable the design team to understand the street pattern and where key frontages were located that would need to be addressed. However due to the



FIG.44 Village Green



FIG.45 Village Square

aspiration to achieve circa 400 units within the exemplar phase car parking was retained on drives to the front of properties although this did cause concern in relation to the definition of the street edges.

It was therefore accepted that whilst this layout had benefits in terms of the larger school site, the retention of the village green and square and consideration having been given to green infrastructure and contours little progress had been made in terms of the housing typologies, parking and the layout of the residential units.



FIG.46 Layout Three

4.2.6 Layout Four

Following a review of the comments received on the previous layouts along with the detailed analysis of the site and its surroundings this layout has evolved with a large number of design changes.

To the north the green link and road link have been unified towards the centre of the plan making a more meaningful space with play facilities and a buffer habitat to the central hedgerow. Furthermore, the road network has become convoluted to increase car travel distances and the reinforcement of the edge buffer zones have softened the plan. A level of complexity has been achieved within the streetscape but this idea continues to develop. The homezones are established and the network of pedestrian and cycle routes are developed.

As a major variation to the previous layouts, the unit types are allocated with reduced massing to edges and significantly the housing is moved to the street edge by removing cars from driveways in front of the houses

and placing them to the side and behind in car parking courts. Finally, the other key factors that are identified on this layout include: the school site being expanded to 0.8 hectares; and the siting of school fields next to the badger sett in the east/west watercourse. Further, the energy centre and village store have been co-located to share the service yard and minimise the impact of the servicing requirements.

The above provisions enabled the formulation of layout four (figure 47) which was the subject of public consultation with residents and key stakeholders in October 2010.



FIG.47 Layout Four- October Consultation

4.2.7 Layout Five – Original Application Submission

Following a review of the preceding layouts an application was submitted to the Council in November 2010. That application was based around the site layout plan shown at figure 48. However the key factors that led to the changes from layout four were:

- Road link minimised to become less intrusive with improved road frontage from houses
- Car courts reduced in size
- Greater complexity and layering in the landscape settings throughout the scheme.
- SuDS proposal developed
- Flood risk information incorporated into layout design
- Ecological Assessments and interpretation made available to allow for development of habitats
- Non-residential uses grouped into a High Street concept that allows for reduced walking distances and car parking duplication.
- School site expanded to 1.34 hectares
- Entrance features developed to mark arrival and

departure from the site

- Village Green replaced by larger open green space along watercourse

The incorporation of the above followed extensive negotiation between the design team, the Councils and following responses to public consultation received from third parties.